

The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, in reserving the right to object, the chairman of our committee and I have both agreed that we need to be debating this during our markup, and we intend to do that.

For that reason, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Iowa.

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, I rise to support my colleague and friend from New York in the call for the consideration of the Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act. This is an effort whose time is well past due.

For too long, our servicemembers have faced the threat and traumas of sexual assault in their own ranks. We must act to prevent these attacks and hold perpetrators accountable. Sixty-five other Members of this Chamber recognize the urgency of our servicemembers' plight. It is time for debate and consideration.

I yield the floor.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### RUSSIA

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I come to the floor in advance of next week's summit in Geneva during which President Biden will meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin for the first time as Commander in Chief, and I would like to share my views on the current state of U.S.-Russian relations and how we must respond to the Kremlin's continued aggression.

I have spent years deeply engaged in efforts to hold Russia accountable for its aggressive and destabilizing behavior under Putin.

During the Obama administration, I worked to hold Russia accountable for its invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, I was sanctioned by Putin himself for taking up the cause of Ukrainian sovereignty and freedom.

During the 2016 election cycle, I sounded the alarm over Russian efforts to sow chaos in our elections long before we knew of the extent and sophistication of the Russian cyber campaign to undermine American democracy.

Throughout the previous administration, I called out President Trump for cowering to Putin at every turn. Trump's refusal to hold Putin to account for attacking our elections was a key motivator behind the Senate's passage of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, otherwise known as CAATSA. This comprehensive framework for oversight and accountability in U.S. policy towards Russia remains the law of the

land and the guiding mandate for how the United States must respond to Kremlin aggression.

Now, I appreciate the Biden administration's desire for a stable and predictable relationship with Russia, but sometimes we don't get to choose the circumstances of our engagement. When we take stock of Russia's behavior in recent years, we see that in every arena Putin has chosen escalation over stability and predictability.

Next week in Geneva, I have every expectation that President Biden will be more assertive with Putin than his predecessor. I urge him to seize this opportunity to call out the Kremlin for its litany of aggressive actions and announce appropriate measures in response.

The President can start with Russia's growing aggression in cyber space, starting with last year's SolarWinds cyber attack. We know that Putin's foreign intelligence service orchestrated this attack and that he must be held accountable for it as well as the more recent hack of USAID and its network of contractors and grantees.

While I am unaware of any evidence that the most recent ransomware attacks on U.S. infrastructure were orchestrated by the Russian state, we know, however, that criminal gangs operate on Russian soil, and we believe that it is those criminal gangs that did such attacks. The United States has to make clear that harboring criminals who seek to attack American businesses, hospitals, pipelines, city governments, and other institutions is wholly unacceptable.

Let me move on to Ukraine. I urge President Biden to reiterate our policy of nonrecognition of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and a call for a serious return to the negotiations to end the war in the Donbas. The United States must have a seat at the table in the Normandy Format and make a concerted effort to end the war on Ukrainian soil that has gone on for far too long. An acceptable resolution to this conflict will not come without robust U.S. engagement the likes of which we have not seen for years.

I am glad that President Zelensky will visit Washington in the next month or so, and we look forward to meeting him in the Senate.

NATO, too, shares a responsibility to take concrete steps next week in support of Ukraine. The essential security assistance provided by the United States and others must be backed up by tangible progress towards NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. The door was opened 13 years ago at the Bucharest summit. We have seen little progress since then. As these countries continue to pursue the necessary reforms necessary for ultimate entrance into NATO, NATO has an obligation to start the membership action plan process.

On Nord Stream, the administration should reconsider sanctions waivers on NS2 AG and Matthias Warnig. If the

pipeline is completed, the United States should work to ensure that it does not become operational. This pipeline is a bad deal for Europe and its energy security and strongly opposed by citizens across the European continent. Despite what some have said, it is not too late for the United States to make a tangible difference here. We can stop this malign Kremlin influence project if we act with resolve and real diplomatic strategy.

Last week, Putin said that Ukraine must show good will—Ukraine must show good will—if it wants gas to flow through to Europe. So what is Putin's definition of "good will" exactly? For the people of Ukraine to cease defending their sovereignty? Such bellicose statements tell us that Putin is confident; he is emboldened. Does anyone really believe that Putin would not cut off gas flow through Ukraine once Nord Stream is complete? The United States cannot accept this insidious behavior. We need a real strategy with respect to Nord Stream.

In Syria, Russia continues to aid and abet the brutal and criminal Assad regime only to secure its own interests; namely, military access to the Mediterranean through which it can threaten Europe's southern flank. Indeed, last year the United Nations accused Russia itself of war crimes in Syria for multiple incidents of launching indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas. In 3 years alone, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimated that Russian military activities in Syria caused nearly 18,000 casualties, including 8,000 civilians.

Let me be clear. These are war crimes, and there must be accountability. Even as President Biden looks for limited ways to cooperate with Russia in Syria to try to promote some stability and humanitarian access, he must not overlook this grim track record and seek to hold Putin to account. The world is watching whether the United States will stand up for the vulnerable and the voiceless.

Let me now turn to the ongoing and tragic repression of the Russian people. Earlier this year, the world drew inspiration from the courage of Russian protesters who rallied in support of Alexei Navalny and a democratic future. We know that it will be the people of Russia, not the United States or anyone else, who will steer their struggle for democracy and ultimately determine their own destiny. Yet, as Americans, we must stand in solidarity with the Russian people.

I applaud President Biden's commitment to make democracy and human rights the centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy, but what does that mean for our approach to Russia? First, we must respond to egregious chemical weapons attacks whenever and however they take place. The Chemical and Biological Weapons Act required the administration to announce a new round of

sanctions by June 2 in response to Russia's chemical weapons attack and poisoning of Alexei Navalny. This deadline has passed.

The Trump administration regularly missed congressionally mandated deadlines. I think back to the Skripal attack and how President Trump delayed a decision for months. However, I expect better from this administration. President Biden and his team must announce these sanctions this week, for Putin has shown no remorse for these vile actions, and Russia has taken no steps to rectify them.

A democracy- and human rights-centered foreign policy also means countering corruption, so I welcome the White House initiative announced last week. Since January, we have seen the President back up this commitment by imposing sanctions on corrupt actors from Bulgaria, to Albania, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But, moving forward, we must do more to focus this tool on Russia, the primary source of so much of the corruption we see around the world.

The most effective sanction on Putin's inner circle of oligarchs is to deny them and their families access to the West. We must cut off their ability to travel and use the Western financial system to funnel the assets they systematically have stolen from the Russian people over the course of several decades.

Alexei Navalny and others, like the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, have done excellent work exposing Putin and his cronies. The U.S. Department of the Treasury and the European Union should evaluate their research and chart a course for action.

We must also directly engage with the Russian people and make clear that our problems are not with them but their government. I urge President Biden to make a direct appeal to the Russian people over YouTube, communicate our views and concerns to the Russian people, and provide his vision for what a positive U.S.-Russia relationship could look like. The United States should also increase exchange programs with Russia, assuming the Russian Government would allow its people to participate.

Unfortunately, everyday Russians' access to fact-based information and reporting is dwindling in the face of Kremlin crackdowns on journalism and pervasive propaganda. I am especially outraged by the Russian Government's decision to label Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in Russia as a foreign agent, subject to fines and to being kicked out of the country, all for supporting Russian journalists who report on the truth—a commodity in short supply in Russia these days. These actions are disgraceful. And it is worth noting that, as legitimate news sources like Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty come under fire in Russia, Kremlin propaganda arms like RT and Sputnik continue to operate freely here in the

United States. We allow them to freely operate, but they are Russia state-sponsored enterprises. Perhaps it is time we reconsider how easily the Kremlin can disseminate disinformation to the American people.

Meanwhile, several Americans remain unjustly detained in Russia, including Paul Whelan and Trevor Reed. The Kremlin's Kafka-esque treatment of American citizens must stop, and President Biden should make their return a priority of the visit.

Finally, our Embassy presence in Moscow faces increasing, growing pressure from the Russian authorities as they seek to restrict visas for Embassy staff. This has to stop. In my view, if Russian diplomats' visas expire here in the United States, then they must leave. Extensions should only be granted when we see reciprocity on the Russian side. No more games. We have tolerated Kremlin abuse of this process for too long, and it has to stop.

In the short time I have stood on this floor today, I have provided but a glimpse of some of the most challenging issues facing the U.S.-Russia relationship, most of which were ignored by the previous administration. President Biden has to correct course and forcefully press these matters in Geneva. However, there is one area that demands real negotiation with Moscow: the issue of arms control.

I supported the extension of the New START treaty. It advances U.S. interests, constrains Russia's strategic nuclear forces, requires stringent verification to ensure Russia meets its commitments, and affords us the flexibility needed to maintain a safe, secure, modern, and effective nuclear deterrent.

The question is, With New START extended, where do we go from here? I agree with President Biden that establishing a strategic stability dialogue with a country capable of destroying the United States is essential.

Russia continues to pursue new destabilizing nuclear systems and actively threaten our allies with shorter range nuclear weapons. However, we cannot view this challenge solely through a military lens. Diplomacy must lead our efforts to reduce nuclear tensions going forward, and this summit would be a good place to start.

Last week, in the Washington Post, former Ambassador to Russia Mike McFaul wrote that the Biden administration "cannot freeze U.S.-Russia relations in place to focus on the greater challenge of China."

I believe he is right. Addressing one challenge cannot come at the expense of other critical U.S. interests.

Whether we like it or not, the Kremlin clearly sees the United States as its primary adversary and remains intent on challenging us at every turn. Past administrations have tried to ignore or minimize the threat. It doesn't work. We need an assertive and comprehensive strategy, one that holds the Kremlin accountable and even puts them on their heels from time to time.

The United States of America always aspires to have a stable, predictable relationship with every country around the world. But stable and predictable partners do not use chemical weapons to wipe out their political opposition. Stable and political partners do not tear chunks of territory from their neighbors. Stable and political partners don't commit war crimes in places like Syria. Vladimir Putin has been President for 20 years now. After all this time, we know what we are dealing with; it is not a stable and predictable partner. We are dealing with a mafia state run by a vicious authoritarian and his inner circle of corrupt oligarchs, not a normal country. We are dealing with a criminal enterprise, not a democratic government. And as President Biden knows, and has said, when it comes to Putin, we are dealing with a ruthless killer. We should act accordingly.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). The Senator from Iowa.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Ms. ERNST. Madam President, you might have missed it, but without much fanfare, the White House quietly released the President's budget on the Friday before a holiday weekend. Maybe we weren't supposed to notice the plan at all, but the contents make it impossible to ignore.

President Biden is proposing higher taxes on working Americans and cuts to our national defense to pay for a massive expansion of the Federal Government, an enactment of the radical progressive demands, like parts of the Green New Deal.

What can't be paid for is simply put on the Nation's "credit card," adding trillions of dollars of red ink. President Biden's budget can be summed up like this: higher taxes, higher spending, and higher debt.

And don't take my word for it. The New York Times wrote that Biden's \$6 trillion budget would "push federal spending to its highest sustained levels since World War II."

Under the Biden budget, by 2028, Washington will collect more tax revenue as a portion of our economy than at nearly any point over the last 100 years. This tax-collecting scheme even includes a retroactive tax increase. That is right, folks, you may owe higher taxes on past earnings.

Plus, the President would allow the tax cuts for lower income and middle-class Americans to expire in 2025, and the result will be higher taxes for most Americans. Higher tax bills will add additional burdens to Iowa families and small businesses already struggling with the rising prices and inflation being caused by Bidenomics.

So what do you get in exchange for all of these new taxes? For the first time in nearly half a century, taxpayers would be forced to pay for abortions. The Biden budget contains \$600 million for electric vehicles. That is a lot of money to subsidize a product